

The Builder.

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HE avidity with which knowledge of past and hidden things is sought for, the extraordinary skill that is shown in the pursuit, and the success which has attended the endeavours, are striking characteristics of the present time. An isolated observation is made; other facts are added; and theory of a whole is deduced in rapid succession. A bone is found, and the animal is created to the sight; a sculptured stone and a few foundations are dug up, and the history of a nation takes a form and completeness which, on the first scanty premises, it would have seemed weakness to expect. One of the most striking instances that can be mentioned of the power of the moderns in this respect is the mastery that has been effected of the headed inscriptions of Assyrian nations, an interesting account of which is given by Mr. Fergusson in his new work on the palaces of Nineveh and Persepolis,*—a work to which we warmly recommend the attention of our readers.

Looking at these markings, so similar in form, apparently no clue remaining, interpretation might have seemed impossible, and it would probably puzzle most readers to devise a first step towards the removal of the mystery in which they were shrouded. To be the process, which led to what may be considered a triumph of modern science over difficulties, would occupy more space than we can give; but we will indicate roughly the course that was taken. Professor Grotefend gave the key: M. Burnouf, Professor Lassen, and Major Rawlinson opened the lock. Grotefend took, for analysis, two short inscriptions at Persepolis, and found that they were identical in form; that one word occurred three or four times over in each (which was therefore assumed to be a title), and was led by this and other minute facts to the conclusion that it was a genealogy that had been recorded, to the extent of father and son. He next proceeded to try to find to whom these names belonged; and, having arrived at the conclusion that Persepolis was the work of the Achaemenian dynasty, he tried their names in succession. Cyrus and Cambyses would not fit, for none of the three names began with the same letter. Cyrus and Artaxerxes were equally inapplicable, as the names in the inscription were nearly of the same length, while one of these was twice as long as the other. He then tried the right ones, and they fitted as nearly as could be expected. He next proceeded to prove that they were the correct ones, by testing the position of the several duplicate letters which occurred in the three names, and ultimately produced such a result as left no doubt in the minds of candid inquirers that he was correct. The further steps we cannot afford space to trace: suffice it to say, there is now not a paragraph in all the inscriptions whose meaning can be considered doubtful.

* The Palaces of Nineveh and Persepolis Restored: an Essay on ancient Assyrian and Persian Architecture. By James Fergusson, author of "The True Principles of Beauty in Art." London: Murray, 1851.

Mr. Fergusson's book, which has led us to these remarks, is another instance of the fact we asserted at starting. A few sculptured slabs and winged bulls are discovered at Nineveh and Khorsabad, and straightway appears before us the buildings which they composed, perfect and complete. Mr. Fergusson, by his travels and studies, was well qualified for the task, and has performed it very efficiently.

In the first part of his work he describes at some length the buildings of Persepolis,—"The richest of cities under the sun,"—which, although long posterior to those on the site of Layard's researches, he considers of the same type. In the second part he describes and reconstructs the buildings of Nimroud and Khorsabad.

We are contented to suppose that the oldest Assyrian buildings yet discovered, the north-west and central palaces at Nimroud, are contemporary with Abraham, and date about 21 or 22 centuries before our era.* The date of the Persepolitan buildings is many centuries after this. The final destruction of Nineveh took place about the year 600 before Christ. The Great winged Bulls now standing dignified, almost sublime, in the hall of the British Museum, have been covered up till now, and are brought to us whole and unharmed, to verify written history, to enable us to realise and people the past, and to correct the vain-glorious feelings of the present. Look at them, good reader, with the mind as well as the eye when you next visit our national repository of monuments. Rome was not founded till centuries after these were worked.

The buildings at Khorsabad, exhumed by M. Botta, on the part of the French Government, are dated by Mr. Fergusson about 1300 years before our era. The specimens brought to Paris, although of the same type as those sent to us from Nimroud by Mr. Layard, show much less power than the earlier works in our possession. In Persepolis our author considers we have the skeleton of a complete system of Eastern architecture,—we have the pillars, the doorways, and windows, but not the walls or roofs. In the Assyrian palaces, on the contrary, we have the walls and their ornaments, but the pillars and windows are wanting; and, by putting the two together, he is able to render both intelligible. Khorsabad offers greater facilities for restoration than Nimroud, and we will take his illustrations of the palace at the former place to elucidate his views.† Fig. 1 is a restoration of the northern angle of the palace-court. Fig. 2 is a section of the principal rooms.

The walls, it will be seen, were exceedingly thick, 16 feet 6 inches, one; 21 feet another, and Mr. Fergusson's main point is this,—that these walls were carried up only a certain height, say 18 or 19 feet, and then that on the top of the wall were placed two rows of dwarf wooden pillars, one on the inner, the other on the outer edge of the wall, which supported a flat terrace roof, composed of mud, and plastered on the top. The larger halls, probably, had pillars down the centre, to help to support the roof; and the central hall, he thinks, must have had a roof higher than the rest, perhaps trussed to a certain extent, as shown in the section. The tops of the walls, paved with

tiles, or floored with wood, had low parapets, and formed a series of upper chambers. By this arrangement, light was admitted to the great halls (tempered by curtains), while both rain and the rays of the sun would be excluded. The theory is very strongly supported, and accounts for the most striking peculiarities of these palaces. The winged lions formed the entrances, and the sculptured slabs, of which so many were found, lined the walls. Above the slabs, the walls were coated with tiles, and specimens of these are to be found in the British Museum. The buildings at Persepolis were probably covered in the same way.

To a person accustomed only to the colourless stone architecture of Europe, such a mode of building and decorating a building may, indeed must, appear anomalous: but it requires only a slight acquaintance with Eastern art, and more especially with that of Persia, to understand that, even setting aside the evidence of existing remains, it is more than probable that this would be the mode adopted for so ornamental a structure as this one appears to have been.

In all ages and in all countries, Eastern architecture seems to have been much more remarkable for its colours than for its forms; and whether we turn to the Alhambra or to the buildings beyond the Indus, the same fact meets us everywhere. It is no matter how flat or how extensive their plain walls may be: everywhere the most exquisite and delicate ornament is found covering them, and relieved with the most brilliant, and at the same time the most harmonious colouring. They were thus enabled to dispense almost entirely with form or shadow, and trusting only to ornament and colour, to render that beautiful which in itself had no pretension to either beauty or design."

The architecture of the Assyrians depended almost wholly for its effect on its sculptured decorations of men and animals, and the coloured adornments with which they were completed. "Least in importance—in the eyes of the Assyrians—were the pillars and the roof they supported, and the walls against which the sculpture and paintings were placed: all this being almost exactly the reverse of what we find in Grecian, Gothic, or modern art; and whether the Assyrians were right or not in adopting this singular gradation of parts, it is, perhaps, of all the circumstances connected with this style, the most interesting, as being literally, to us, a new idea in art, though perhaps the first and oldest form of art that the young world knew."

Our third illustration is a possible view of the Hall of Xerxes, at Persepolis, without the columns and ornaments which covered its walls, and adorned the roof. The centre hall of this enormous building covered internally more than 40,000 square feet, or with its walls, 55,700 feet.

"The great hall at Karnac, the most stupendous building of antiquity, covers internally 58,300 feet, and, with its walls and porticoes, only 89,500, and the two largest temples of antiquity,—those of Jupiter Olympian at Athens and Agrigento,—cover respectively only 59,000 and 56,000 feet. We have no cathedral in England that at all comes near it in dimensions; nor indeed in France or Germany is there any one that covers so much ground. Cologne comes nearest to it—81,500 feet: but, of course, the comparison is hardly fair, as these buildings had stone roofs and were far higher. But in linear horizontal dimensions the only edifice of the middle ages that comes up to it is Milan cathedral, which covers 107,900 feet, and (taken all in all) is perhaps the building that resembles it most both in

* Rawlinson does not give them so great an antiquity.

† See page 146. The ruins of Khorsabad are situated about ten miles north from Nineveh. The city walls were 60 feet thick at the base and about 34 feet high.